

Conference on Effectively Restoring Ecosystems
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I currently coordinate with the five COE districts with jurisdiction in Illinois and for the past three years have worked extensively with the St. Louis District on the American Bottom Interior Flood Control and Ecosystem Restoration Project. I would like to emphasize the following positive aspects and important contributions that working with the Corps has brought to this project and a few points where improvements in how the CORPS/DNR partnership interacts and how IDNR as a local sponsor manages our project responsibilities.

On the positive side:

The Corps has evaluated this restoration project at the ecosystem level which has included the review of the geomorphic and natural history of the flood plain and how the upland watershed along the bluffs impacts the natural resources remaining on the flood plain.

Competition between economic development interests and the need to preserve green ways, wetlands and the demand for wetland mitigation sites is intense in the Metro-East area just across the river. The Corps through this ecosystem project has partnered with the NRCS, the Illinois Department of Transportation, local units of government and my agency to utilize a comprehensive approach to ecosystem restoration by integrating IDOT mitigation sites, FEMA buy out areas, NRCS Wetland reserve lands and IDNR property. I think this will provide for a more efficient use of the personnel, monetary and natural resources available to us and that it will significantly improve the overall chances for us to have a successful project at the ecosystem level.

The Corps has brought a higher degree of expertise to the project than we could do alone. The Corps has provided expertise in the fields of engineering, economics and natural resource analysis. From my perspective having the Waterways Experiment Station (WES) provide both HEP and HGM programs has been a learning experience for all of us on the review team. The interagency team approach has been effective and is one of the best methods.

With regard to other Corps/DNR initiatives our partnerships enable us to explore a variety projects through the 206, 1135 and EMP programs.

On the other side:

We have found on large projects that the Corps operates at a higher level of quality in the fields of planning and engineering combined with extensive internal compliance regulations generally results in higher project costs. Often we do not have the ability to finance our share. However, under Governor Ryan's administration it has been much easier to obtain the needed funds from the Bureau of the Budget.

As a local sponsor I think it is up to us to provide improved scopes of work to the Corps. In the past I know we have not identified specific project goals and developed comprehensive and detailed scopes and this has resulted in an inefficient use of the Corps resources delayed implementation of the project.

For the Corps part, we think the Corps needs to clarify the rules for the development of an ecosystem restoration projects. It seems they are made up as we go along. We don't often know what can or cannot be done as a component of the project.

Regarding matching funds for cost shared projects; We think local sponsors need to receive credit for personnel services, land acquisition and rights, easements, rights-of-way and O&M budgets. This is an area where we could use the help and expertise of the Corps in the development of a process to effectively track eligible cost share components. We feel this type of assistance would be of great value to all of the local sponsors.

Thank you.